

Putting Nurses to Work in the Economic Recovery Package

Option for Consideration

Background

At a time when millions of Americans are unemployed, there are well over 200,000 good paying nursing jobs in our hospitals, nursing homes, home health agencies, community health centers, and public health departments going unfilled largely because our nursing schools lack the faculty and other capacity to educate enough students. In 2006, some 88,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing schools. A modest, well-targeted investment in capacity expansion at our nursing schools would pave the way to fill many thousands of these job openings within the next 2-3 years and provide a crucial part of the health care workforce infrastructure necessary for successful health care reform. The nurses produced through this investment are the chronic care/prevention managers, care coordinators, and nurse educators of tomorrow.

Proposal

Using general authority under Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act, provide \$200 million in grants to accredited nursing schools to enable them to rapidly admit more graduate and undergraduate nursing students.

- Schools would have to demonstrate how the funds would be used to increase capacity over Fall 2008 semester levels and to specify the number of additional students to be enrolled.
- Funds could be used to hire new faculty and for a variety of innovative capacity-expanding approaches, such as the acquisition of simulation or other capacity-expanding technology, moving part-time faculty to full-time status, retention of near retirement faculty, or recruiting clinical partners to engage in supportive teaching roles.
- Preference should be given to nursing schools granting baccalaureate and graduate degrees and to community colleges partnering with such schools.
- Preference for new admissions enabled through use of these funds could be given to qualified applicants who are returning veterans.
- To assure that states do not rely on federal funds to replace state cuts, institutions applying for these capacity expansion grants should certify that funds received would supplement and not replace existing funding and that no reductions would be made in nursing faculty positions in either calendar year 2009 or 2010.